

## Stop caretaking the borderline or narcissist: how to end the drama and get on with life

Margalis Fjelstad

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Those who suffer from Narcissistic Personality Disorder or from Borderline Personality Disorder (Henceforth to be referred to as NPD and BPD individually and as BP/NP as a group) tend to employ an array of both normal and abnormal defense mechanisms, which are automatic mental responses designed to protect the ego from stress, anxiety or conflict. However, these defense mechanisms are extremely harmful to those who live with the BP/NP, and occasionally, those mechanisms will draw a well-meaning person into a degrading and *crazy-making* relationship, henceforth referred to as *Caretaking*.

*Stop Caretaking the Borderline or Narcissist: How to End the Drama and Get on with Life* by Margalis Fjelstad is self-help book for those who are trapped in a dysfunctional and self-destructive relationship with loved ones who have borderline or narcissistic personality disorders. In first section of the book, titled *Understanding the Caretaker Role*, Fjelstad provides the reader with the tools to identify whether he or she is or acts like a Caretaker (with a recommended *Caretaker Test* in the appendix), as compared to merely an altruist, and whether a loved one is a BP/NP, along with an overview of borderline and narcissistic

personality disorders using a biopsychosocial and casework based approach from the author's own experiences as a psychotherapist who specializes in the relationships of BP/NPs. She helps the layperson understand these disorders by using accessible terms, specific examples, and DSM IV criteria. Fjelstad then explains the Caretaker term, or someone who gives up their identity to meet the emotional needs of a borderline or narcissistic loved one, and points out some typical feelings of a Caretaker and the different types of Caretakers. Fjelstad then helps the reader understand how well-meaning individuals can become Caretakers and continue to stay in this role out of *fear, obligation, and guilt*. By focusing on the emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and relationship distortions of Caretakers within their relationship to the BP/NP, she shows readers how caretaking inevitably leads to an endless cycle of relationship chaos, self-neglect, and despair. She ends with saying that the BP/NP cannot be changed and so any improvement must come from the Caretaker's side, starting with letting go of the hope that Caretaking will work.

In the middle section of the book, titled *Letting go of Caretaking*, Fjelstad provides readers with guidance on how to break free of the caretaker role even if they choose to continue their relationship with the BP/NP. It describes the process of healing from being a caretaker using Elizabeth Kubler-Ross's stages of grief: Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, and Acceptance, also including three more specifically for Caretakers: Setting Boundaries, Letting Go, and Rebuilding; all of this is directed toward moving a Caretaker to Self-Care. Readers learn to stop trying to change their loved ones with BPD or NPD and instead focus on skills that they can use to improve their interactions with the BP/NP. They are

taught how to set boundaries, let go of their over-involvement with the BP/NP in his or her life, and to rebuild their individuality. Fjelstad also gives readers a sense of relief by reminding them that they are separate and unique individuals who are not responsible for the feelings and behaviors of others, in particular the BP/NP, whose perception of reality heavily skewed by their illness.

In *Rebuilding*, the last section of the book, Fjelstad focuses on how individuals can improve their lives and wellbeing after overcoming the caretaker role. It encourages readers to build a better support system, avoid falling back into caretaking patterns, and define and create their own lives. Readers learn how to build healthier relationships based on reciprocity, honesty, and the creation of appropriate boundaries. The approach to these concepts makes the book easy to read, understand, and implement, which gives it a particular elegance.

In conclusion, the editor has assembled a cohesive guide for individuals to identify a problem relationship and to take clear and definite actions to increase their health, whether or not they remain in the relationship with the BP/NP. It successfully bridges the gap between the usually vague and mystical self-help book and the dry and difficult to understand psychological text for professionals, offering sound and detailed advice based on the experiences of a medical professional. The book is skillfully crafted, offering valuable insights to laymen afflicted by this issue and to professionals treating these conditions.

Peter G. Bota, Ela Miropolskiy,  
Vy Nguyen  
UC Irvine Health Neuropsychiatric  
Center, Orange, CA, USA